

The Resurrection!

1 Cor. 15

In the early days of the church, the topic of nearly every sermon was the same. The Apostles certainly preached about sin and the need for repentance, but before they preached repentance, they would always preach about Jesus and His resurrection.

Acts 2.29-33	Peter following Pentecost
Acts 3.13-15	Peter following the healing of the lame man outside the Temple
Acts 4.8-10	Peter's defense before the Sanhedrin
Acts 11.39-41	Peter's sermon to the household of Cornelius
Acts 13.26-31	Paul, Antioch Pisidia
Acts 17.29-31	Paul on Mars Hill, Athens
Acts 23.6b	Paul before the Sanhedrin
Acts 24.14-15	Paul before Felix

When Paul preached to the people of Athens, at first those who heard him thought he was talking about some new god from a foreign country – in fact, it seemed that Paul may have been talking about two gods – Jesus and Anastasis.

Then, after listening for a short time, they realized that anastasis was not a god or goddess, but the concept of resurrection. That is what turned most of them off, and they began to revile Paul and to refer to him as a silly babbler.

And so it is with much of our world today. As Ecclesiastes says, there is nothing new under the Sun.

Many of these wise men of Greece were either atheists or believed that, if God exists, then he is transcendent, with little or no interest in humankind.

For most of the people of Paul's day, the events of life were determined simply by fate – man was at the mercy of nature and science and so everything depended on reason – not much different from the way people believe today.

Paul taught that the world is controlled by God – that God created everything. He taught that God is the source of all life, breath and provision, and that He determines the times and boundaries of nations.

Paul taught that, in light of God's sovereignty rule over the world, men must repent so that their sins can be forgiven, for there is coming a day of judgment when God shall judge the world based on His Law and His righteousness.

And to assure that what He says is true, God verified His authority by one of the most incontrovertible facts in all of history – the resurrection of Jesus.

Everything that is true about the Christian worldview is founded on the truth of the resurrection.

John Stott wrote that...

Christianity is in its very essence a resurrection religion...The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed.

With that in mind, we need to look into the subject a little further and make every effort to understand what the resurrection means in the plans of God.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote what may be the greatest treatise on the resurrection contained in Scripture.

He began Chapter 15 of this letter to the church at Corinth with a summary of what he most likely preached in other cities where he established churches.

1 Cor. 15.1-8

Here is one of the clearest statements of the Gospel. Maybe you aren't able to remember all of the verses that are recommended in a witness training seminar. That's ok. You only have to remember what Paul said here.

He said, "Let me remind you of the gospel I taught to you:

1. Jesus died and was buried.
2. He rose again and was seen.

Here is the Gospel stated as simply as anyone knows how.

1 Cor. 15.12-19

Think of how remarkable was this claim that Jesus had been resurrected.

We tend to think that because the story of the resurrection is an old story that took place in ancient times that maybe the people of that day were not astounded by the claim.

After all, we are more educated today and we all know that when people die, they stay dead. But what makes us think that this was any less remarkable to the people of Jesus' day? It had been known since time began that when people die, they stay dead.

There is no evidence that, to the people of Jesus' day, that this was an odd kind of miracle that happens from time to time and that the disciples hoped would happen to Jesus.

When Mary and Peter and John discovered the empty tomb and then had personal encounters with the risen Christ, they were no less amazed than any of us would be if a similar event happened today.

Of course it could have all been made up. But there are several things related to the story that verify the resurrection as truth.

1. Women were primary characters in the story.

In the 21st century, this seems to be a strange form of proof. Women are primary characters in our society at every level. But it is not true in every community around the world, and it certainly was not true in 1st century Palestine.

No person of that time, trying to convince the world of a lie, would have used women as main characters in the story.

2. Jesus appeared physically the same, but was able to come and go without doors.

Everyone who saw Him – and there were over 500 people who did – eventually recognized Him. They knew Him as He was before. He looked the same, but there was certainly something different, because now He no longer was hindered by walls – or by time and space.

3. The empty tomb.**4. The appearances.**

If there had been an empty tomb without appearances, then the claim that the body had been stolen might have had merit. At least the disciples would have had some serious explaining to do.

If there had been appearances without an empty tomb, the people could have been accused of believing in ghosts and spirits or of having vivid imaginations.

But both things were true – The tomb was empty and Jesus was seen alive.

5. The reaction of the disciples

During the 50 years or so before the time of Christ, there were several men who made messianic claims. They taught about the kingdom of God, salvation, and deliverance. Each one of them

experienced a violent end. If your messiah was executed, you could just wait until another came along and follow him, hoping for the best.

So Jesus' experience was not so unique in the time period of the New Testament – except for one thing – Jesus' disciples not only continued to follow Him, but became bolder and bolder in their claims and in their presentation of the Gospel.

Many of them died for their testimonies – evidence that something spectacular had taken place that emboldened them and convinced them that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah.

Throughout history, many men have died for a lie. But no man will die for what he knows to be a lie. So what the disciples were willing to die for must have been the truth.

So what happened? What is the resurrection experience about?

Here is what happened in the resurrection: Jesus did not just come back to life. He died. There is plenty of medical and historical evidence to verify that He did not just swoon from loss of blood and resuscitate in the coolness of the tomb.

Jesus did not just go to death – He actually went through death and out the other side of death into a new form of existence with a new kind of life that the disciples had a difficult time understanding and describing.

In the resurrection of Jesus, God launched a new kind of existence.

The resurrection of Jesus is only the preview of what God is planning to accomplish in the entire cosmos.

Look once again at what Paul wrote in verse 19.

NLT: ...if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

In the fullness of time – meaning when He gets ready – God will put all things right in the Universe. The Bible speaks of the “new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.” (Rev. 3.12)

Coming down to where? To the earth – when God makes the New Creation out of the old and heaven and earth – now two separate spheres – become one – no longer separated but united as God had intended.

You see, sin did not just separate man from God, but it separated Earth from Heaven. The same gulf that exists between man and God exists between creation and heaven.

The Bible says that even the creation is groaning in travail – as a woman in labor – waiting for the birth of the New Creation to be born from the womb of the old.

Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

We tend to think of the soul as being the only immortal part of man. The body may die, but the soul lives forever. The way we believe about such things affects our concept of heaven.

The belief that “the body may die, but the soul lives forever” implies that we will live in some nether region of eternity as disembodied souls – like ghosts floating among the clouds with angels and harps and ambrosia.

But we need to know that our bodies are headed for immortality also.

Jesus went through death, retaining the same body He had on earth, yet with some really unimaginable changes that only God could comprehend.

Yet in all ways He was recognized. Even Stephen, stoned by the Jews for his testimony to Christ, just before he died, looked up and saw Jesus standing at the right side of the throne of God.

Two things to note:

1. He was able to see into heaven, so the distance could not have been at the edge of the Universe. Heaven has to be somewhere close by. Jesus, in fact, taught that the kingdom of heaven is at hand – meaning that it is so very, very close.
2. Stephen, looking into heaven, recognized Jesus standing there. So Jesus was in heaven – in an immortal state – in the transformed, yet recognizable, body that He inhabited on earth.

When we die, we enter the presence of Jesus – that is Paradise. But one day, there will be a resurrection, and we will be given new bodies – yet not completely new.

We will get our present bodies reconditioned for eternal existence. All that is wrong or could go wrong – all of the limitations we now experience – will be done away with.

Transformation of our bodies is not so difficult to comprehend when you realize that we are being transformed now. On both a cellular and molecular level, your body is being completely recreated every seven years.

You have a different body than you had seven years ago, but you are still very recognizable.

Go back with me to the reference in Romans 8 once again.

Romans 8:23 ...we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Notice in the verse from Romans 8 that Paul said we groan for the redemption of our bodies, not redemption from them.

2 Cor. 5:4 For we who are in this tent (the earthly bodies in which we now dwell) groan, being burdened, not because we

want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

I am sure you have seen someone deathly ill. After leaving the hospital, you probably said something like, “he was just a shadow of himself.”

Yet all of us are only shadows of what we will one day be when we are resurrected – when we pass through the pathway of death into the eternal existence that God has planned for us.

1 Cor. 15:42-44, 51-53

Knowing all of this is one of the things that makes salvation such an appealing concept.

Many might preach and most Christians see salvation as God rescuing us from this world. What we don't understand is that that is not the purpose of salvation. That is the purpose of death.

Salvation is about much more than being rescued from this world. Salvation is about being rescued from death. That is the purpose of the resurrection.

It is why the resurrection is the central belief of Christianity.

What should be our response to the resurrection?

- **For the person who knows Christ as Savior and Lord, look at the end of 1 Cor. 15:**

1 Cor. 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Since the resurrection life is a continuation of this life, what you do in this life should matter all the more. What you are doing now is literally building a treasure for the life that is to come after you pass through death, and everything matters:

- how much you love,
- how many you disciple,
- how faithful you are in small things,
- how faithful you are in giving.

We often talk about building the kingdom of God as if we were able within ourselves to affect anything for God. But we are not called to build the kingdom.

We are called to build **for** the kingdom.

- **For the person who has not acknowledged Christ as Lord and Savior, I take you back to Acts 17:**

Acts 17:30 Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

In an earlier sermon, after Peter had preached the message of the death and the resurrection of Jesus, his listeners asked...

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Here is Christ's offer to you on this Easter morning: Repent, acknowledge Christ as Lord, and receive His most wonderful gift of forgiveness of sin as well as the promise of the resurrected life that we have talked about briefly this morning.